

Indiana program helps horses, inmates

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"There should be more job opportunities out there when the inmates leave prison."

Mitch Daniels,
Governor



Photo Caption: Gov. Mitch Daniels petted a goat at the Putnamville Correctional Facility. His administration has emphasized agriculture-related training at the prison, including the program for retired racehorses.

PUTNAMVILLE, Ind. - The rescue program for racehorses has been in place for only a month, but inmate Timothy Anderson of Indianapolis already has picked his favorite: Bert's Nicky.

"It's his attitude," said Anderson, who is serving a seven-year sentence at the Putnamville Correctional Facility for robbery and dealing drugs. "One minute he's quiet, one minute he's too excited."

Anderson should know. By 7 a.m. every day, he's at a newly renovated and expanded barn to care for the six former racehorses that now make their home in a 150-acre pasture on prison grounds.

Soon, another 44 or so horses will be introduced into the program.

Eventually, about 20 inmates at a time will participate. They wash and feed the horses, cut the grass and clean the stalls.

"It's great being outside," Anderson of his job, which he'll likely keep for about six months. "It's a whole lot better than being stuck in a classroom."

The program is sponsored by the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation, an organization based in Saratoga Springs, N.Y., and dedicated to saving retiring racehorses from slaughter.

It started 25 years ago in a New York prison and has now expanded to include facilities in six states, with programs planned in two more. The list includes the Blackburn Correctional Complex in Lexington, Ky.

"There's an ever-increasing need. There are more and more horses that need homes," said Diana Pikulski, the foundation's executive director. "The program has proven so successful for inmates and for departments of corrections that they're calling us to say they want a program. We don't have to seek them out."

Lisa Lamb, a spokeswoman for the Kentucky Department of Corrections, said the Kentucky program "has been superb."

There are 68 rescued horses at the Blackburn farm and 18 inmates are assigned to the program at any given time. Some have left prison and found work on area horse farms, Lamb said.

"There's always a long waiting list for participation," she said. Inmates "work with these horses that have been broken down. They nurture them and bring them back to a point of being able to be adopted. Sometimes, it's the first time they've cared for anything in their lives."

Indiana officials hope to achieve similar success. Gov. Mitch Daniels visited Putnamville on Friday, touring the thoroughbred barn as well as a handful of other training programs.

The facility sits on nearly 2,600 acres in rural Putnam County, land marked by small hills and valleys, vast meadows and small homes built from bricks long ago fired at the prison. At one time, inmates

farmed the land, producing food for much of the state's prison system.

But those programs were abandoned in the early and mid-1990s as it became cheaper to hire private companies to do that work. With a renewed emphasis on training inmates, however, farming and industrial programs have made a comeback.

The governor's tour included the prison's cattle farm, where inmates are raising a herd of Black Angus, and he also stopped to see a goat herd, a computer refurbishing center and a building where inmates were ripping apart old pallets to make new ones that the state sells to private companies.

Wade Kent, a training supervisor, said many of the programs allow inmates to earn certifications or complete apprenticeships they can use to find jobs when they're released.

"These inmates are learning how to get up in the morning, come to work and do a day's work," Kent said.

The thoroughbred program is the latest of these efforts.

Robert McFarland, one of the corrections officers assigned to the barn, used to run a breeding farm in Pennsylvania. He said he's happy to be participating in a program that saves horses.

"A lot of horses get sent for killing. I sent hundreds for killing," he said. "If they can't make enough to pay the cost of keeping them, then breeders aren't going to keep them. Breeders are in it for the money. They have to be."

At Putnamville, one of the thoroughbreds was never a winner on the racetrack. Another was forced to retire with a fractured kneecap.

And yet another - Creeks Code - had \$200,000 in lifetime racing earnings but still was only days from slaughter when he was saved by the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation and sent to the program.

Daniels said the program's timing is fortuitous. With the legislature's decision to allow the state's two racetracks to install slot machines, Indiana's racing industry is expected to expand.

"There should be more job opportunities out there" when the inmates leave prison, Daniels said.

Joe Davidson, an inmate from Terre Haute who was sentenced to 10 years for manufacturing methamphetamine, likes the idea of learning a new skill.

So far, he's been working with a team of inmates renovating the existing barn and building a major expansion with eight additional stalls. Soon, he'll join the thoroughbred program.

Although Davidson said he plans to return to a career in construction when his sentence ends, he said the skills he expects to learn working with horses will provide him with other job opportunities.

"I like being around horses," he said. "So this will be something to fall back on in leaner times, something other than crime."

Floyd DeVoss, an inmate from West Lafayette who is serving time for driving while intoxicated and driving on a license that had been suspended for life, is finishing work installing electricity at the barn and will then join the thoroughbred program.

DeVoss has spent much of his life around livestock. But he said the program will be good for inmates from the city who have had less exposure to animals.

"There are petting zoos out there, but some kids have never even seen live animals," DeVoss said. "This is going to be a really good experience for me and for a lot of these people."

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About The Department of Correction

The Department employs over 8,000 employees and houses 24,000 adult and juveniles in 32 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>. The Department's Re-entry Site can be found: <http://www.reentry.in.gov>.